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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 001603

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG - HARRIS, PM - RLOFTIS AND G/TIP - PATEL  
DOD FOR OSD - MAXELROD, LYOUNG, SYOUNG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/26/2016  
TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [KMIG](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: COM USAFE AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE DISCUSS SOFA,  
AFGHAN PRTS AND TIP

REF: 05 TUNIS 2568

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. DAVID BALLARD FOR REASONS 1.4 (b)  
AND (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. During his June 25-26 visit, the Commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe General William Hobbins met with Tunisian Minister of National Defense Kamal Morjane to discuss bilateral military relations. Morjane said the Ministry of Defense had provided the MFA with a draft response on the Status of Forces Agreement. Gen. Hobbins encouraged Tunisia participation in the Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and Morjane indicated civilian support may be possible. Morjane also said the GOT is interested in bilateral cooperation to combat illegal migration. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) PARTICIPANTS:

U.S.:  
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General William Hobbins, COM USAFE  
Command Chief Master Sergeant Gary Coleman, Senior Enlisted Advisor, USAFE  
Hunter Hustace, Political Advisor, USAFE  
Colonel Bradley Anderson, Defense Attache, Embassy Tunis  
Lt. Colonel Chris Herndon, Office of Defense Cooperation Chief, Embassy Tunis  
Susannah Cooper, Acting Pol/Econ Chief, Embassy Tunis

TUNISIA:  
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Kamel Morjane, Minister of Defense  
General Mahmoud Ben Mhamed, Chief of Staff, Tunisian Air Force  
Colonel Habib Boughoula, Office of the Minister  
Colonel Mohammed Sghaier Hosni, Director of Protocol, MOD

[1](#)3. (C) SOFA: Morjane began by stating that the Ministry had completed its first draft response to the proposed Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA, reftel). Morjane said that the draft was not a counter-proposal, but rather an attempt to summarize the discussion that Tunisian President Ben Ali had regarding the SOFA with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in February. Morjane said that he hoped to finalize the SOFA, which is in the interest of the two armed forces. Morjane's staff indicated the MOD draft was now with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for review.

[1](#)4. (C) AFGHAN PRTS: General Hobbins highlighted the important role Provincial Reconstruction Teams are playing in

contributing to the stability of Afghanistan and asked for Tunisian support for the PRTs. Morjane said the Tunisia military participates in international peacekeeping efforts, but is limited by its capabilities and the desire to fall under the U.N. umbrella in such activities, particularly given "sensitivities in our region." "We prefer countries where we can be seen as neutral," said Morjane, noting Tunisia was unwilling to contribute forces to Darfur. Morjane added that Tunisia will continue to help diplomatically, supporting a moderate position, but that "you may not be able to count on us on the ground." Morjane went on to say that, while unwilling to provide military support, Tunisia could provide civilian assistance to Afghanistan, particularly in the areas of health and women's rights. He also indicated that the GOT may be interested in sending a few individuals to Afghanistan. (COMMENT: This could be part of a EUCOM visit to explore opportunities for civilian cooperation. END COMMENT.) Morjane noted that, as far as he knows, the Afghan government had never formally approached Tunisia directly about possible assistance.

15. (C) **TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS:** Turning to the military's role in monitoring Tunisia's maritime borders, Morjane expressed his shock that more than 600 individuals had been intercepted in the past week attempting illegal migration by sea. Noting he did not know why there was such a surge in recent attempts, Morjane said most of the attempted migrants had originated from Libya. He praised the good cooperation Tunisia has with Italy and Malta on this issue and said that he hopes to reinforce U.S.-Tunisian bilateral cooperation related to illegal migration.

16. (C) **COMMENT:** Morjane was more forward leaning in his discussions with General Hobbins than he -- or other GOT officials -- has been in the past, particularly with regard

to the SOFA and PRTs. However, his suggestion that the GOT is prepared to support U.S. goals on the SOFA, PRTs or TIP has not been reinforced by our other contacts in the GOT. Post will continue to engage on these topics to determine the true extent of GOT interest in and willingness to move forward on these issues. END COMMENT.

17. (U) General Hobbins' party did not clear this telegram.  
BALLARD